

by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.

Synthetic Sticks

Unfortunately, it is slowly becoming a fact that top-quality wooden drumsticks are getting harder to come by. Recently, a new generation of drumsticks have started to appear on the market—synthetics. Why a synthetic stick? Synthetics are impervious to temperature and humidity changes, are always straight, always balanced alike, and supposedly, have a greater longevity over traditional wood drumsticks. Naturally, with all of this modern technology, combined with the price of materials, these new sticks cost more than wood. At today's prices, five pair of nylon-tipped wood sticks cost approximately \$32.00 list—more than the average cost of one pair of synthetics. If you get at least 5:1 life from these new synthetics, then you've at least broken even.

Trying to test drumsticks for such a wide assortment of readers is somewhat difficult. Many variables are involved. A light player will certainly get more mileage from a single pair of sticks than a loud rock drummer. I've tried to generalize here for the benefit of all players. Actual testing was involved for all sticks.

AQUARIAN

Famed drummer Roy Burns has stepped into the market with his *Formula X-10* sticks. *X-10s* are made of black *Nylonex*; a combination of nylon and synthetic materials. The lower half of the stick has a satin-textured grip; the upper half is glossed smooth and reinforced at the neck. All the *X-10* models have nylon tips, as well as a vanilla-colored plastic cap at their butt ends, for players who like to use their sticks backwards. Two tips are available: olive and modified ball. *X-10* sticks are front-weighted, making loud drumming a bit easier without fatigue.

Furring of the *X-10s* from cymbal crashes and hi-hats is no greater (perhaps even less) than wood sticks. In fact, Roy told me that if the surface is too hard and won't allow this chewing, then cymbals will crack. The taper area will wear down in time, however.

Aquarian claims 15:1 longevity over wood. I have used them over the past three months and have found no cracks

or dents in the stick body, especially in the rimshot area, where damage is usually the greatest. Even the nylon tips stayed on.

Using *X-10s* on a ride cymbal produces a loud, explosive sound. One of the best things about the *X-10s* is the volume of a Latin rimshot. These sticks produce the loudest one I've ever heard. The satin grip is excellent and the sticks won't fly out of your hands. For quieter playing, though, I would prefer them without the weighted front.

The Aquarian *Formula X-10s* seem quite durable with no big sacrifices in sound or feel. Six models are available at \$27.50 a pair: *Jazz*, *Combo*, *Concert* (with olive tips); *Funk*, *Rock* and *Bruce Gary* model (with ball tips). A marching stick is in the works.

RIFF-RITE

Riff-Rite uses graphite as their sole material. The entire stick is made of black graphite from tip to butt with solid ends and hollow handles. The sticks have a rounded butt end and are available with or without a 5" cork wrapping at the handle.

It's a fact that graphite composites stand up to impact forces extremely well. Graphite tennis rackets are a good example. Riff-Rite claims 8:1 longevity over wood sticks. Stick for stick, my own testing found 10:1. The testing ended when one Riff-Rite stick developed a hairline crack along its length at the weld, presumably from too many hard rimshots.

The cork handles are optional, however, doing a Latin rimshot with the butt end of a cork-covered Riff-Rite decreases the volume of the rim shot. After excessive use, the cork will begin to split. The cork does lessen the shock transmitted to your hand, and does aid in a better grip on what would ordinarily be smooth graphite.

Regular rimshots, even on die-cast hoops, do not dent the stick. But as with wood sticks, continued cymbal crashes or edge-of-hi-hat playing will cause furring of the stick fibers. With the graphite tip, cymbals are pitched in-between a wooden and a nylon tip. They do have a

louder sound.

Riff-Rite makes several models: *5A*, *6A*, *Rock*, *5B*, and soon, a marching stick. I like the feel and response of these sticks, ideally for a quieter type of gig, as they are the lightest of all the sticks reviewed here. Perhaps a rubber grip instead of cork would hold up better. Riff-Rite sticks retail at \$36.00 a pair; \$45.00 a pair with the cork handles.

DURALINE

RDSI, the people who gave us Syndrum, are also producing synthetic sticks. The material used in the Duraline sticks is Kevlar. Kevlar is used in the aerospace industry for fuselage shells, and is also used in bulletproof vests. Duraline sticks are colored white, and have transparent acrylic tips. Their butt end is cut flat, not rounded like most other sticks. I would not recommend using them backwards. The sticks have a porous surface which helps the grip once your hands get wet.

I'm not completely wild about the feel of the Duralines, and they seem to give excessive rebound. Models available are: *7A*, *5A*, *5B*, *2B*, and *3S*. Prices range from \$17.00 to \$21.00, making them the least expensive of all the brands listed here.

LASTICS

Lastics manufactures two models of drumsticks, both made of phenolic material/cotton weave. The sticks are similar in appearance to Pro-Mark's *Tatsu* sticks: no formed tips, just a graduated taper. The butt end is rounded like a conventional stick. *Lastics' Rock* and *Jazz* models are only 15.3" long. The *Jazz* model has a 9/16" diameter; the *Rock* model is 5/8" diameter, and weighs in at almost 90 grams.

Without regular tips, rebound is difficult. On a ride cymbal, the resulting sound is somewhat hollow, but there is volume (power players take note). The sticks will not dent easily from rimshots, but the outer material at the taper will gradually wear away, exposing another surface underneath. During testing, I

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Close-up continued from page 46
took a chunk out of the upper area of the stick.

If you like the *Tatsu* sticks, then you may like Lastics, though I just couldn't get used to them. The material could be okay in mallet shafts, but as drumsticks, I feel they should redesign the concept. Lastics are available factory-direct in black or brown at \$24.95 a pair. The address is: 2947 Tilden St. N.W., Washington, DC 20008.

HI-SKILL

A composite of materials is used in these sticks. The company wouldn't say exactly what, but I feel the main ingredient is fiberglass. Only one model is currently available; the *Rock Stik*, which is approximately the size of a 5B. The Hi-Skill stick has a reddish-brown, thin-ribbed finish for most of its length. The taper area is shaved smooth up to the nylon tip (natural tip is also available). The butt end has a synthetic white cap.

A Hi-Skill spokesman admits that the sticks are not unbreakable, but claims they will outlast conventional wood sticks. In my testing, they held up well, with no damage to the rimshot area. I found the weight to be pretty much to my liking. Hi-Skill sticks just might be good for all musical uses though the overall feel was a little too slick. I'd prefer a rougher finish. They retail at \$35.00 a pair.

Some of these sticks are expensive, but like a mechanic who wants the best tools for *his* job, drumsticks are the drummer's tools. What with the shortage of quality wood with proper moisture content, I can appreciate what these manufacturers are trying to do. Plastic took a while to be fully accepted over calfskin. Do you want to make the change?



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ments. If you're using fiber or soft cases for the drums, a larger trap case will be best. Spare cymbals will easily fit in with the others and spare bass drum heads will usually fit nicely within your bass drum case, next to the heads for the floor toms. The other spare heads can be a challenge. It's helpful to take them out of

their boxes so they will take up less room. They *should* fit into the bottom of a rolling trap case, *or* you could use an extra case to carry a spare snare drum and heads.

A standard, steel toolbox is perfect for tools, keys, and small parts. Spare stands should easily fit in with your other stands. You could also use a strong, old suitcase to store various spare parts. *Neatness counts.* Be able to pull out *any* odd necessity at a moment's notice. Know where everything is.

Caring for Cases

Your cases should be in as good shape as your drumset. If a case is battered and ready to spill its contents—replace it. If a case has a frayed strap or a dinky wheel—replace it. Your equipment should be kept fully protected and secure when in transit. Know the exact number of cases you're carrying and always make sure that you've taken them all with you. It's too easy to leave one important thing behind. Any extra space inside cases, where things can bang around, should be filled with foam rubber or suitable packing material.

A few minutes here and a few dollars there will pay you back with interest. You'll never have to perform without your complete set-up. Avoid those embarrassing moments and remember: A well-maintained drumset is a happy drumset!



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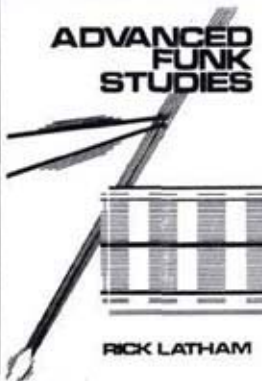


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